

Direct U.S. Contact With North Viet

By Dom Bonafede and Tom Lambert
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

CPYRGHT

WASHINGTON

The White House yesterday acknowledge for the first time that there has been direct contact between the U. S. and the North Vietnamese Communists in efforts to end the war.

The contact involved a meeting between an American and a North Vietnamese representative, at which the latter was handed a "document," it was learned reliably. The contents of the document were not disclosed, but it may have contained this country's schedule of 14 points for negotiations to end the Viet Nam war. The site of the meeting was not disclosed.

Press Secretary Bill Moyers refused to elaborate, despite persistent questioning by reporters. He would not say who participated in the peace overtures, how they were made or whether they are continuing.

Nonetheless, this was the first admission of direct contact with the North Viet Nam government since President Johnson launched his peace offensive on Christmas Eve.

The White House announcement, made on the day Congress reconvened, is expected to bolster the President's position on Capitol Hill, as well as muffle some of the criticism aimed at the U. S. role in Viet Nam.

CONGRESS

The Viet Nam issue is certain to dominate the current session of Congress. Yesterday's admission underscores repeated declarations by the President that he is willing to take part in unconditional discussions with the North Vietnamese.

The disclosure by Mr. Moyers of direct contact came in response to a newsman's question concerning a statement by Prof. Staughton Lynd, of Yale University, who recently returned from a 10-day self-appointed peace mission to North Viet Nam, accompanied by Thomas Hayden, of the

Democratic Society, and Herbert Aptheker, American Communist theoretician and director of the American Institute for Marxist Studies.

Mr. Lynd criticized the Johnson administration for "the apparent failure to make direct contact" with the Vietnamese Communists in its peace proposals.

Asked about the criticism, Mr. Moyers replied the professor was "incompletely informed."

The Press Secretary was then asked if this meant that there has been direct contact with Hanoi.

"That's a safe deduction," he replied.

He later stated outright that there had been direct contact between the two governments. But he stood firm against further comments as to whether the contact was by face-to-face confrontation, telephone or other means. Nor would he state whether the contacts had been fruitful and still going on.

"I've said all I'm going to say, Mr. Moyers declared.

Conceivably, the contact could have been made in any one of the 13 foreign capitals where both governments maintain diplomatic or other official representation.

Or, the contact could have been made by any one of the President's flying peace emissaries in a secret meeting with a representative of the North Viet Nam government.

campaign, the U. S. had indirect contact or conducted "soundings" several times with the North Vietnamese through third-party nations.

None of these communications resulted in any positive results, as far as is known.

Mr. Moyers also reported yesterday that Ambassador-at-large W. Averell Harriman would probably go from Australia to Saigon, continuing an intensive peace mission to European and Asian capitals.

Mr. Harriman, U. S. Ambassador to the United Nations Arthur Goldberg and G. Mennen Williams, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, were sent by President Johnson on peace-seeking tours to Europe, Asia and Africa.

Mr. Moyers did not relate Mr. Harriman's probable visit to Saigon with his remarks about direct contact between the U. S. and the North Vietnamese.

Reaction by Congress to the White House's acknowledgment was prompt and favorable.

Sen. Mike Mansfield, D., Mont., majority leader, commented, "All I can say is it is a very hopeful sign, and it is the first sign of contact with Hanoi."

Sen. Mansfield, who recently returned from a fact-finding trip to Southeast Asia and issued a pessimistic report on the possibility of an early settlement, said he had not received any official word of the contact.

"But it speaks well for the intensive efforts made by the President not only over the past two weeks, but over the last eight months," he added.

Sen. John Sherman Cooper, R., Ky., said he was pleased by the report. The U. S. should now concentrate on negotiation rather than escalation, he commented. The contact, Sen. Cooper added, may develop an atmosphere for "negotiating a just and honorable peace."

Sen. George Aiken, R. Vt., who accompanied Sen. Mansfield on his trip, remarked, "I hope it is true. I hope it is a first step toward further understanding between the conflicting parties."

Earlier in the day, Mr. Moyers said, the President held a lengthy meeting on foreign affairs with his top advisers. Present were Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, Under Secretary of State George Ball, special consultant Gen. Maxwell Taylor,

and Richard Helms, Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mr. Moyers identified Mr. Helms as "acting directors of the CIA." The press secretary said that Mr. Helms usually attends high-level White House meetings when Adm. William Raborn, CIA director, is unavailable.

Mr. Moyers said yesterday that Adm. Raborn was out of town but did not explain his designation of Mr. Helms as "acting director." For several weeks there has been speculation that Adm. Raborn would soon step down, and that Mr. Helms may succeed him.

Mr. Moyers said that Viet Nam was "only one of several subjects" discussed at the White House meeting.

He said the President is spending much of his time drafting the State of the Union message, scheduled for delivery before Congress tomorrow evening.

In reply to an inquiry about the budget, Mr. Moyers said it was his "guess" the total figure would be closer to 115 billion than 110 billion.